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Franken, Walz Introduce Bipartisan Legislation to Help Tackle VA Backlog

Washington, DC [3/4/15] – Today, U.S. Sen. Al Franken (D-Minn.) and Rep. Tim Walz (D-Minn.) announced the re-introduction of the *Quicker Veterans Benefits Delivery Act of 2015*, a bipartisan, bicameral bill aimed at tackling the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefit-claims backlog. “We know that our veterans’ battles don’t always end when they return home,” **said Sen. Franken**. “Too many return with mental and physical disabilities incurred while protecting our freedoms. All they expect in return for their service is for our nation to keep its promises and get them the VA benefits they’ve earned. Our legislation would help the VA speed up the claims process that is making far too many veterans wait far too long to get help they need.”

“After these brave men and women put their life on the line for us, the least we can do is ensure they are getting the benefits they have earned in a timely manner,” **said Rep. Walz**. “I recognize this problem was not created, nor will it be solved, overnight, but we can and must do better. Our bipartisan legislation will enhance the VA’s current efforts to break the backlog by helping them become more efficient, and will help veterans get the benefits—and the care—they deserve quicker.”

As identified by the VA, for a veteran to qualify as in the backlog, they must be waiting 125 days or more for the VA to process their claim. Currently, hundreds of thousands of veterans are in the VA benefits backlog. While the VA has taken steps to reduce the backlog, problems persist and there is still significant work that needs to be done to address the claims process and prevent future problems.

The Franken-Walz bill was written after engaging veterans and groups representing them at the local, state, and national level to determine where the current problem lies. While there is no silver bullet that will end the backlog overnight, the Franken-Walz legislation will go a long ways to cut through bureaucratic red tape for veterans and help them get the benefits and care they need.

The Franken-Walz legislation will accomplish this by allowing local doctors to conduct disability medical examinations for veterans. Currently, veterans must visit a VA facility for this examination. Allowing veterans to see a local doctor for their initial examination conserves VA resources, cuts back on long wait times at VA hospitals, enables quicker diagnoses of disabilities, and eliminates unnecessary trips to the VA for veterans in rural communities.

Additionally, the Franken-Walz legislation requires the VA to complete two reports:

- One report 180 days after passage to track the bill’s implementation; and
- An annual report that tracks the most common reasons and disabilities for which claims submitted using evidence by local doctors were denied by the VA.

Sen. Franken’s and Rep. Walz’s goal with this legislation is simple: to uphold the promises our nation has made to our warriors.